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St. Helena

Working paper prepared by the Secretariat

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I. General

1. The Territory of St. Helena,[1] which is administered by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, consists of the island of St. Helena and two dependencies: the island of Ascension and a group of small islands forming the dependency of Tristan da Cunha.

2. Situated in the South Atlantic Ocean, approximately 1,900 kilometres from Angola and 2,900 kilometres from Brazil, St. Helena is a small island of volcanic origin. The Territory comprises a total land area of 412 square kilometres: Ascension lies 1,200 kilometres to the north-west of St. Helena, and Tristan da Cunha and the other small islands are approximately 2,400 kilometres to the south of it. St. Helena, where Jamestown, the capital of the Territory, is located, is the largest island, with an area of 122 square kilometres. The islands enjoy a tropical climate tempered by trade winds that blow throughout the year. They have a distinctive flora and fauna, with many rare or endangered species.

3. The inhabitants of St. Helena, who number approximately 5,000, are known as "Saints" or St. Helenians, and are of mixed origin. Approximately one third reside in Jamestown. English is the only language. Access to St. Helena is provided by the *Royal Mail Ship (RMS) St. Helena*, which stops en route between Cardiff in the United Kingdom and Cape Town in South Africa. The nearest airstrip is located on Ascension.

II. Historical background

4. St. Helena was discovered by the Portuguese navigator, Juan da Nova, on St. Helena Day, 21 May 1502. It was an uninhabited island. Its existence was kept secret until the English seafarer Thomas Cavendish came upon it in 1588. In 1633, the Netherlands claimed it but did not occupy the island. In 1658, a charter from the Lord Protector of Britain authorized the British East India Company to colonize and fortify the island, which was subsequently settled by the English. Slaves were brought from Africa, Madagascar and the Far East. Chinese and some Indian indentured labourers were brought to work on the island. King George II issued a charter to the East India Company setting out how the island should be fortified and governed. In the charter the King also gave the inhabitants full English citizenship in perpetuity. Napoleon Bonaparte was exiled to St. Helena from 1815 until his death in 1821. St. Helena became a Crown Colony in 1834.

III. Constitutional and political background and developments

5. The St. Helena Constitution Order of 1988, which entered into force on 1 January 1989, replaced the Constitution of St. Helena and dependencies introduced on 1 January 1967. Under the new Constitution, the Governor and Commander-in-Chief, who is appointed by the Queen, administers the Territory. He is assisted by an Executive Council and a Legislative Council.

6. The Legislative Council comprises the Speaker, 3 ex officio members — the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary and the Attorney General — and 12 elected members. The Executive Council is presided over by the Governor and consists of the ex officio members mentioned above and five of the elected members of the Legislative Council. Although a member of both the Legislative Council and the Executive Council, the Attorney General has no vote in either body.

7. Elections are held by secret ballot at intervals of not more than four years, by universal adult suffrage for those 18 years and older. Two political parties exist nominally, but since 1976 they have been inactive and elections have been held on a non-partisan basis.

8. The judicial system, based on the laws of the United Kingdom, is administered by the Supreme Court (there is a non-resident Chief Justice) and by a Magistrate's Court presided over by the senior of the three magistrates sitting at a session. There is also a Juvenile Court and a Small Debts Court. Provision exists for a Court of Appeal consisting of three judges, which can sit at Jamestown or London.

9. In January 1983, when the British Nationality Act came into force at the end of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) conflict, St. Helenians had their citizenship rights taken away. Islanders consider that the restoration of full British citizenship to the people of the Territory is a matter of basic human rights. Islanders have had no nationality other than British (see para. 4 above). In order to support the restoration

of full rights of citizenship of those British subjects who are St. Helenian, a Citizenship Commission was set up in 1992 as the Bishop's Commission, by the Anglican Church on St. Helena. The Commission has 13 members on St. Helena and its branch in the United Kingdom has 7 members. Its main activity centres on bringing about public awareness locally, nationally and internationally about matters concerning citizenship and constitutional development of the Territory of St. Helena and its dependencies.

10. In 1994, the Legislative Council requested a review of the Constitution to include provisions for a bill of rights. The administering Power noted the statements made regarding the Constitution and was prepared to discuss it with the people of St. Helena. It also noted that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association had sent a delegation in 1996 to study the Constitution. There followed a number of discussions and debates within both the Legislative Council and the House of Commons. More detailed information about political developments in and regarding St. Helena between 1994 and 1999 is covered in previous reports (A/AC.109/2071, paras. 5-8, A/AC.109/2115, paras. 4-8, A/AC.109/1999/16, paras. 4-12 and A/AC.109/2000/8, paras. 13-17).

11. On 17 March 1999, the Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom, Robin Cook, submitted in the British House of Commons a White Paper entitled "Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories".[2] The White Paper enumerated the changes in the status of the United Kingdom's Dependent Territories, including the Territory of St. Helena and its dependencies. The title of the Territories was changed from "British Dependent Territories" to "British Overseas Territories" to reflect the United Kingdom Government's stated goal of partnership with those peoples.

12. The stipulations in the White Paper of greatest relevance to St. Helena are: an offer of British citizenship, and with it, the right of abode in the United Kingdom to those that choose to accept it; a commitment to continuing financial assistance to those Territories, including St. Helena, that remain economically dependent on British aid; and the creation of an Overseas Territories Minister and a Council of the Overseas Territories, both having responsibility for the needs of the Territories. The Council would include the Chief Ministers of each Overseas Territory and would convene annually. The Citizenship Commission and the elected members of the Legislative Council discussed the White Paper and presented their findings to the Government of the United Kingdom in June 1999.

13. On repeated occasions during 1999/00, members of the Legislative Council, the Citizenship Commission and members of parliament speaking on behalf of St. Helenians have called for prompt legislation to ensure the restoration of citizenship rights. According to press reports, in December 2000, following the absence of any reference to the matter by the Queen in her annual speech, the Minister for Overseas Territories, Baroness Scotland, stated the following:

> "I well understand that there will be disappointment about the Overseas Territories bill. I want to reaffirm that the Government remains committed to introducing legislation as soon as possible to ensure that our offer of citizenship, outlined in the White Paper, is delivered. We recently initiated a consultation process with the Overseas Territories on issues relating to the bill and its implementation. This process is in prime position to act as soon as the bill becomes law."

Similar assurances were made by the Governor of St. Helena in January 2001 and by Prime Minister Tony Blair in May 2001 in response to a letter from Bishop John Salt, Patron of the Citizenship Commission.[3]

14. Elected members of the Legislative Council and the Citizenship Commission continue to request that discussions with the United Kingdom authorities not be limited to the citizenship issue but also include debate on the merits of different constitutional options for St. Helena, namely the status quo, Crown dependency or integration. In this respect the Commission recalls the conclusion of its first report in 1996, as follows:

> "We consider the island's young people who have not yet made their life and money and home; it is not an escape route to England that they need but the political and economic basis to make a good life as British citizens on their own island."[4]

15. A memorandum from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the St. Helena Legislative Council, which is summarized in the *St. Helena News* of 5 January 2001, reiterates that neither integration nor Crown dependency status is on offer and points to

the view that progress can only be made in developing the current constitution of St. Helena as an Overseas Territory.

IV. Economic conditions

A. General

16. In "The St. Helena Strategic Review 2000-2010", issued in September 1999, the Government of St. Helena pointed out that a key difficulty in assessing the state of the economy remained the lack of up-to-date and accurate economic indicators.

17. According to the country policy plan (2001-2003) of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, the economy of St. Helena remains dominated by the public sector, with government expenditure equivalent to around 95 per cent of the gross national product. Government employment is around 60 per cent of total employment and employment in the public sector overall (including parastatals and majority-owned enterprises) accounts for some 70 per cent of the total. According to the Department for International Development, this dominance is inconsistent with longer-term economic development.

18. St. Helena possesses few natural resources. As food production is insufficient to supply the island's needs and there is a lack of manufacturing industries, the vast majority of the island's requirements must be imported. The cost of living in St. Helena is higher than in the United Kingdom, owing to costs related to the remoteness of the island. The retail price index in February 1999 was 111.82 (base year November 1994 = 1,000), compared with 109.62 in February 1998. St. Helena's economy is aid-dependent, relying on resources from the United Kingdom for approximately 26 per cent of its 1997/98 public-sector recurrent budget. Development aid represented another 18 per cent of its budget. Virtually all its capital investment and the majority of the technical cooperation it receives is funded by the Department for International Development, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Union.

19. In the St. Helena Strategic Review 2000-2010, the Government outlines the options for St. Helena to generate sustainable wealth under the following categories: internal investment; tourism; exports; and import substitution. With the exception of the last, all are heavily dependent on significantly improved access. It is the Government's view that the shipping schedule currently in place fails to deliver the type of access that the island needs. This means that without a fundamental change in access, St. Helena will continue to be an aid-dependent Territory for the foreseeable future and the level of aid required will have to increase yearly just to maintain the current level of services. There will also be a greater dependence on expatriate staff to deliver services that are currently provided principally by St. Helenians, (see also para. 28 for further discussion of access to St. Helena).

B. United Kingdom development assistance

20. In 2000, a new country policy plan for the period from 2000/01 to 2002/03 was agreed between the United Kingdom's Department for International Development and the Government of St. Helena. The country policy plan committed the Government to a significant change in programme designed to make the island more self-sufficient by promoting the private sector and raising efficiency in the public sector. The Department for International Development pledged £29 million in development assistance resources, an increase of £3 million compared with the previous country policy plan period. Within this amount, a budgetary aid allocation of £12.6 million was agreed upon to meet anticipated budget deficits over the next three years, based on budget projections produced by the territorial Government.[5]

21. The development assistance agreed under the country policy plan also comprises an annual subsidy for the operation of the *RMS St. Helena* and support for bilateral development assistance; awards for training in the United Kingdom; and a number of infrastructure development projects such as road works and wharf improvement.

C. Development projects

22. The UNDP 1997-1999 country cooperation framework for St. Helena, which was extended into 2000, was focused on employment and sustainable livelihoods. Given the Territory's efforts to increase the

role of its private sector and to mitigate unemployment, it was agreed that the emphasis would be on activities in private sector development, particularly on enterprises linked to tourism. Within this development context, the following projects were implemented:

(a) **Tourism**: providing technical and other assistance in the implementation of development and marketing proposals in the tourism master plan for the island;

(b) **Support for sustainable livelihoods**: assisting the Government of St. Helena by strengthening its capacity to plan and implement development projects for the purpose of promoting long-term sustainable human development, by providing technical support, training office staff and producing the island's first national human development report;

(c) **Tourism sector employment and private sector development**: stimulating the private sector through the development of the tourism industry through vocational training projects and improving the island's tourism product.

23. The second UNDP country cooperation framework for St. Helena (2001-2004) maintains the above projects in a revised form. UNDP states that while tourism-sector employment and private-sector development are making good progress, tourism is unlikely to increase significantly unless air and/or sea access is improved. In the meantime, it has been agreed to add further dimensions to UNDP development aid; the first is a scientifically based study to determine the causes of contamination of the island's water supply and the second is to provide fisheries with remote-sensing equipment to enable St. Helena to protect, far more efficiently than at present, its territorial waters.

D. Agriculture and fisheries

24. According to the St. Helena Strategic Review (2000-2010), land is a scarce resource on the island and it is not well used. There are four major uses: commercial, residential, government and amenity. A high proportion of land is classified as "Crown wastes" and protected for reforestation with native species. The majority of agricultural land is owned by the Government and leased for subsistence farming, mainly for pasture with a small amount for arable land. The Government also owns the majority of forestry land. The Agriculture and Forestry Department provides support to smallholder producers, including agricultural loans, through a revolving credit fund. The principal export crop is coffee, of which 1.597 tons were exported to the United States of America, South Africa and the United Kingdom in 1999/00. All other crops are for food or fodder. Potatoes are the main carbohydrate staple, although greatly supplemented by imported rice. Livestock include (in descending order of quantity), poultry, goats, sheep, cattle and pigs. Half of the agricultural production is sold through retail outlets, 42 per cent is sold privately and 6 per cent is kept for household consumption. The recent opening of a meat processing business is expected to improve marketing. The main marketing organization is the St. Helena Growers Cooperative Society, which has 108 members.

25. The St. Helena Fisheries Corporation processes and exports frozen fish. The total value of exports for 1999/00 was £92,465. The total value of fish processed and sold on the domestic market was £135,581. Projected income from fishing licences is expected to decrease from £700,000 in 2000 to £200,000 in 2001, mainly owing to a decrease in the request for licences from Japanese fleets.[6]

E. Manufacturing and industry

26. There is no large-scale industry on St. Helena. All crafts are produced on a cottage industry basis, with technical, financial and marketing facilities provided by the Government through the St. Helena Development Agency, established in 1995 to promote the private sector. In financial year 1999/00, the Agency approved loans totalling £138,115 and grants amounting to £40,832. This financial assistance is focused on industries identified as having the greatest potential for development, namely, fishing, agriculture, tourism, exports and import substitution.

F. Transport, communications and utilities

27. The island has over 100 kilometres of surfaced roads, to which 0.5 kilometres were added in 1999/00. There is no airport or airstrip on St. Helena, and no railway. The only port is Jamestown, which provides good anchorage for ships of all sizes. The island's main

link with the outside world continues to be the *RMS St. Helena*, which is owned and chartered by the St. Helena Shipping Company, Ltd., and which plies between Avonmouth in the United Kingdom and Cape Town in South Africa, calling at the Cape Verde islands and Ascension. The service receives an annual subsidy from the United Kingdom.

28. In the St. Helena Strategic Review (2000/2010), the Government stresses that "the island's extreme aid dependency cannot be reduced until access to the island is fundamentally improved". In September 2000, the Foreign Office appointed High Point Rendell, a consulting company, to undertake a comparative study of air and sea access to identify the least costly solution to St. Helena's future international passenger and cargo transport needs. The final report was expected to be available for discussion by mid-2001. The Government of St. Helena has already declared its preference for air access as the most effective way to attract investment and tourism and to create much-needed local employment.[7]

29. Electricity (by diesel and wind power) , water and roads are provided by the Public Works and Services Department, which employs approximately 273 workers. The Department's annual expenditure is £1.8 million and it receives income from the sale of power, water and services, totalling some £1.2 million.

G. Banking and credit

30. The only bank is the Government Savings Bank, which does not offer the full range of normal commercial banking facilities. Limited credit facilities for house-building and home improvements are made available on very easy terms through the Government Housing Loans Board and the Government Savings Bank.

31. All financial transactions are ultimately channelled through London, and United Kingdom bank rates apply. No exchange controls operate on the island and, to the extent that overseas transactions are channelled through London, United Kingdom control measures apply. The deficit in the island's trading operations is in effect made up through the grant-in-aid from the United Kingdom Treasury.

32. The value of local currency in circulation as at 31 March 2000 was £2,942,650, of which £2,492,470 was in notes and £450,180 in coins. The St. Helena pound is equivalent to the pound sterling.

H. International trade

33. St. Helena's main imports are food products and tobacco, motor spirits and fuel oil, animal feed, building materials, motor vehicles, machinery and spare parts. Its only exports are fish (including what is said to be the world's first organically registered wild fish), handicrafts and coffee. Its main trading partners remain the United Kingdom and South Africa. Other partners include Brazil and Ascension.

V. Social conditions

A. General

34. Comparisons of indicators that appear in both the 1987 census and the 1998 census show a steady improvement in St. Helena's standard of living. However, according to the St. Helena Strategic Review, over the same period real wages in the public sector fell by around 16 per cent while the number of St. Helenians working offshore roughly doubled. Thus, the St. Helena's increased standard of living can be considered to be principally attributable to offshore employment and its related remittances. The Department for International Development/Foreign and Commonwealth Office team, which negotiated the country policy plan for 2001/01 to 2002/03, states that, measured by international norms, St. Helena is a middle-income country with few signs of real material poverty. However, the team adds that this is largely owing to the all-encompassing government safety net, which guarantees everyone a minimum standard of living, and to social networks, which encourage the distribution of income among kin, most notably in the form of remittances. The country policy plan identifies two particularly vulnerable sectors, namely the increasing number of elderly people (expected to be 24 per cent of the population by 2010) who live on social benefits, and the disabled, who have special, unmet needs. It also points to a "culture of dependency" on the island, partly as a consequence of the Government being the main employer and almost the only provider of services. The Government notes in the St. Helena Strategic Review that the impact that the future restoration of British citizenship may have is as yet

unknown, but it adds: "In general, it can be expected that it will be the young people who will leave the island and a high proportion will not return. This will lead to a greater imbalance between young and old and there is every reason to believe that, over time, St. Helena will become an island of the old, poor and unemployable." Faced with this prospect, recent strategic plans for the Territory have been aimed at identifying options to generate sustainable wealth on St. Helena.

B. Employment

35. As a result of the dependence on imports, the paucity of exports and a small internal market, there are limited employment opportunities on St. Helena. The public sector remains the dominant employer, accounting for over 70 per cent of those employed. Offshore employment, mainly in Ascension and the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), has grown rapidly over the last decade, increasing from 20 per cent to over 30 per cent of the total workforce, and now stands at its highest level ever, some 1,300, of a total workforce of 3,700. The restoration of British citizenship may see a further increase in the numbers seeking work in the United Kingdom. There is a concern, in the longer term, about sustaining services and infrastructure.

36. As virtually all contracts for offshore employment are for unaccompanied workers, there is considerable dislocation of families. Slightly more than 100 offshore workers have left children in care on St. Helena. Of that number, 67 per cent are cared for by grandparents and 33 per cent are in the care of other relatives or friends.

37. At the end of March 2000, 494 needy people were receiving income-related benefits, at weekly rates varying from £18.95 to £45. In addition, an unemployment allowance was paid to 80 people, at rates varying from £12.80 to £40 per week.

C. Public health

38. According to the administering Power, recurrent public health expenditure in 1999/00 was £1,651,040, which is 13.28 per cent of the total government recurrent expenditure. There is a 42-bed general hospital in Jamestown, seven outpatient clinics, an elderly care complex, a centre for the mentally infirm and a centre for the mentally and physically handicapped. St. Helena has a very high incidence of diabetes and hypertension, widely perceived to be genetic in origin. The rapidly ageing population is increasing the pressure for medical resources. Given St. Helena's geographical isolation, the areas of greatest financial concern in the public health area are the high cost of drug purchases and the coverage of inevitable overseas referrals.[8]

D. Education

39. Education is compulsory and free for children between 5 and 15 years of age. In 1999/00, 830 children were attending 8 public schools in the Territory. There were 122 teachers, of whom 117 worked full time and 5 part time. Total expenditure by the Education Department in 1999/00 was estimated at £1,248,690, which is approximately 10.04 per cent of the total government recurrent expenditure.

40. The introduction of British standardized tests in English and mathematics in the first and middle sections of school have shown that the majority of pupils score lower than their British counterparts. Results from the secondary school examination for students 16 years of age and over show that these pupils are also seriously underachieving, with less than 12 per cent each year attaining the minimum five qualifying grades for the General Certificate of Secondary Education or equivalent, compared with 40 per cent in the United Kingdom. These problems have been attributed in part to the high level of staff turnover and their lack of qualifications and experience.

E. Environment

41. St. Helena has an environmental conservation programme aimed at preserving endangered species and diversity of habitats. The plants that are unique to St. Helena form an important part of the Territory's heritage and could potentially increase tourism. The World Conservation Union lists as endangered 40 per cent of the St. Helena's plants, while other conservationists insist that the actual proportion is higher still. Concerted efforts are being made to ensure their survival and conservation. During 2000, the islanders planted over 4,000 gumwood trees in the Millennium Forest in an effort to regenerate native

species. The Territory also sent delegates to environmental conferences held in Gibraltar and the Isle of Skye.[9]

VI. Dependencies of St. Helena

A. Tristan da Cunha

1. General

42. The dependency of Tristan da Cunha[10] is composed of four islands, the main island, named Tristan da Cunha, plus Gough, Inaccessible and Nightingale. Tristan da Cunha, a round volcanic island with an area of 98 square kilometres, is the most remote inhabited island in the world. Its closest neighbours are St. Helena, 2,334 kilometres to the north and Cape Town, 2,778 kilometres to the east. Its population was evacuated to the United Kingdom when the volcano last erupted in 1961, but they returned in 1963. The only settlement on the island is the capital, Edinburgh of the Seven Seas. According to the Administrator, as of December 2000, the population was made up of 283 people divided into approximately 100 households.[11] A team of South African meteorologists lives on Gough. Inaccessible and Nightingale are uninhabited.

2. Constitutional and political status

43. Executive authority for Tristan da Cunha is exercised by the Governor of St. Helena. A resident Administrator is appointed by the Governor and is responsible to him. The Administrator is advised by an Island Council, led by the Chief Islander and comprising eight elected members (including at least one woman) and three appointed members. Elections are held every three years. All registered voters over 18 years of age are eligible to vote.

44. Tristan da Cunha has its own legislation, but St. Helena law applies to the extent that it is not inconsistent with local law, in so far as it is suitable for local circumstances and subject to such modifications as local circumstances make necessary. There is one full-time police officer and three special constables. The Administrator is the Magistrate.

45. Residents of Tristan da Cunha will receive the options of British citizenship and residency after parliamentary passage of the resolutions contained in the White Paper entitled "Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories" (see para. 12).

3. Environment

46. The islands have a very distinctive endemic flora and fauna and are important breeding grounds for many seabirds, many of them rare, such as the Tristan Albatross. The declaration of Gough Island as a World Heritage Site and of Inaccessible as a nature reserve means that 40 per cent of the dependency's land is under protection. Marine life is also protected. In March 2001, the Administrator signed a regulation creating a reserve for whales and dolphins throughout the territorial waters.[12]

4. Economic and social conditions

47. According to the Administrator, Tristan da Cunha is almost self-supporting economically, with overseas funding required only for large capital projects. The Government is the chief employer on the island with a work force of 143. The lobster factory provides permanent employment for 23 and casual employment for a further 110 people on fishing days, when 20 small island boats catch lobster for processing. The lobster fishery is operated under an exclusive concession granted by Tristan da Cunha to a South African company. Two company ships fish around Inaccessible, Nightingale and Gough, while the islanders fish around Tristan da Cunha. In addition to royalties and employment, the fishing company also provides a passenger and cargo service to Cape Town. Other sources of income — a limited tourist industry based on three or four ship visits per year and the sale of postage stamps — cannot realistically be increased significantly. Other potential sources, such as the sale of mineral water, would require considerable capital investment.

48. Revenue provided by the royalties from lobster fisheries and interests from a reserve fund finances government activities such as the provision of free health care and education. Tristan da Cunha's only hospital is staffed by a qualified expatriate medical officer and four nurses. When required, medical treatment is provided overseas. The Tristan da Cunha Government has recently bought a house in Cape Town to accommodate islanders who are evacuated there for medical treatment.

49. Education is free and compulsory for all children between 5 and 15 years of age. Working men and women are encouraged to continue their education under a "day-release" programme.

50. There are no air services to Tristan da Cunha. Transport to and from the island is provided by the yearly call of the *RMS St. Helena*, an occasional passenger ship, two fishing concession vessels and the South African research vessel *SA Agulhas*. Owing to rough seas the harbour is accessible only for 60 to 70 days a year. Improvements to the harbour are considered vital to Tristan da Cunha's future. Work is under way to design and construct a safer harbour which would increase visits by passing ships.

5. Development assistance

51. The United Kingdom's assistance to Tristan da Cunha is modest and consists of support for the provision of medical care on the island and continuing support for the Fisheries Management Project. The European Union also provides financial assistance for the purchase of machinery to be used in the construction of the harbour.[13]

B. Ascension

1. General

52. Ascension was discovered by the Portuguese in 1501 and "found" again on Ascension Day in 1503 by Alphonse d'Albuquerque, who named the island. In 1815, when Napoleon was a prisoner on St. Helena, a small British naval garrison was stationed on Ascension. The island remained under Admiralty supervision until 1922 when it was made a dependency of St. Helena. From then until 1964 the island was managed by the Eastern Telegraph Company (renamed Cable and Wireless in 1934). In 1964, in view of the plans to establish British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Composite Signal Organization stations, an Administrator was appointed. During the Second World War, the United States Government built the Wideawake airstrip on the island. In 1957 a United States Air Force presence was re-established and the airstrip and ancillary facilities were enlarged. It is now the south-east tracking station for the United States Air Force Eastern Test Proving Ground. In 1982, it became the intermediate stop for Royal Air Force flights to and from the Falkland Islands (Malvinas).

53. Ascension covers an area of 90 square kilometres and is of volcanic origin. There is no indigenous population. The total population is about 1,100, comprising the employees of companies established on the island and their family members.

2. Constitutional and political status

54. Executive authority for the Territory is exercised by the Governor of St. Helena. A resident Administrator is responsible to the Governor. Ascension Island's own legislation is of a limited range. However, English law applies to the extent that it is not inconsistent with local law, in so far as it is suitable for local circumstances and subject to such modifications as local circumstance make necessary.

55. Ascension has for many years been primarily an important communications centre. Thus, until very recently, all public services were provided by Ascension Island Services (AIS), a joint venture partnership between BBC World Service and Cable and Wireless directed by a London Board of "Users". Owing to changed geo-political priorities and rising salaries, in 1999 the London Board decided to disband the joint venture by 31 March 2001. The Overseas Territories Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office then commissioned the University of Portsmouth to examine the provision of financing for Ascension's public services and the island's long-term development options. Based on the University report's findings, a new governance structure has been established on the island as follows: with the dismantling of AIS on 31 March 2001, the Ascension Island Government has taken on responsibility for providing health and education services. Other services, such as road maintenance, refuse disposal and port operation, are now provided by a statutory body known as the Ascension Island Works and Services Agency, wholly owned by the Government. Other facilities hitherto provided by AIS, such as the guest house and island shop, are to be operated by a new company, Ascension Island Commercial Services, jointly owned by the Government, BBC World Service and Cable and Wireless.[14]

3. Economic and social conditions

56. According to the Administrator, revenue for the first year of operation of the new Ascension Island Government will derive mainly from the employment

levy which will continue to be charged, from the Users (BBC and Cable and Wireless), from receipts from the Ministry of Defence and from receipts for services and goods provided by the Government (such as postage stamps and immigration fees). With respect to long-term funding, the aim is to introduce a fiscal system and a customs regime within the next year without decreasing the purchasing power of the people living on Ascension and without increased costs for the Users.

57. Ascension is of considerable environmental interest as it is a breeding site for the green turtle and numerous species of seabirds, as well as home to abundant marine life. According to the Administrator, efforts are being continued to develop a sustainable, low-volume eco-tourism industry on the island.[15] The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has recently committed £500,000 to restoring the seabird and turtle colonies on Ascension. The project covers the appointment of a Conservation Officer as well as eradication measures against rats and feral cats to protect bird life. This contribution will be matched by a major fund-raising campaign by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.[16]

58. Regarding air access to Ascension, talks are continuing with the United States authorities with regard to opening up Wideawake airport to civilian commercial flights.[17]

VII. Future status of the Territory

A. Position of the administering Power

59. The White Paper entitled "Partnership for Progress and Prosperity" (see para. 11) proposes the granting of the option of British citizenship and the right of abode in the United Kingdom for residents of St. Helena, as well as a renewed commitment to assisting St. Helena's economic development. The objectives in providing development assistance are stated in the paper as follows:

(a) To maximize economic growth and self-sufficiency through sensible economic and financial management, leading to graduation from such support where this objective is feasible;

(b) To ensure in the meantime that basic needs are met, including the provision of essential infrastructure;

(c) To support the good governance of the Territories, including the proper management of contingent liabilities and the fulfilment of the United Kingdom's international obligations, particularly human rights and the multilateral environment obligations.

60. The representative of the United Kingdom, in addressing the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly on 26 September 2000, said, inter alia that over the past year, further progress had been made towards the modernization and development of the relationship between the United Kingdom and its Overseas Territories — one of her Government's priorities since coming into office. The inaugural meeting of the Overseas Territories Consultative Committee had taken place in London in 1999, and the second meeting would be held in London on 3 and 4 October 2000. The meeting provided a forum for structured political dialogue and exchange of views between the elected representatives of the Overseas Territories and her Government concerning the management of public affairs and the future development of the Overseas Territories.

61. She added that her Government provided support to Territories affected by disaster, and offered a wide range of development assistance to those Territories that needed it. At the same time, in a spirit of partnership, it continued to promote sustainable development under strategic country programmes. For the United Kingdom, the wishes of the peoples concerned, exercised in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and other international treaties, were of paramount importance. The relationship continued to be based on the principles of self-determination; mutual obligations; freedom for the Territories to run their affairs to the greatest degree possible; and a firm commitment from the United Kingdom to help the Territories economically and to assist them in emergencies.[18]

B. Position of the Territory

62. In September 1999, the Government of St. Helena published "The St. Helena Strategic Review 2000-2010", in which it outlined its medium-term and long-

term vision for St. Helena. In that document the Government states that its aims, although ambitious, are realistic and must be achieved if St. Helena is to become a sustainable economic entity. Further, the restoration of British citizenship is of key importance.

63. In its review, the Government points out that St. Helena remains heavily dependent on aid from the United Kingdom to retain its current standard of living. Noting the objectives of the United Kingdom (see para. 59 above), the strategic review is based on assisting the United Kingdom in achieving those objectives with regard to St. Helena. However, the review concludes that "without radically improved access there is no future for St. Helena"; what is meant here is air access. The Government of St. Helena recognizes that air access offers the Territory its last opportunity to break out of its aid dependency and to achieve its vision. It expresses the hope that the Government of the United Kingdom realizes this as well and that it will fund an airport on St. Helena.

64. The Citizenship Commission of St. Helena, established in 1992 (see para. 9 above), continues to defend the restoration of full rights of citizenship for St. Helenians, as well as their right to consider changes in the Territory's constitutional relationship with the United Kingdom. Recently, on behalf of the Citizenship Commission, the Faculty of Law of the University of Toronto examined the merits of this case in accordance with international law (see also para. 68).

VIII. Consideration of the question by the United Nations

A. Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

65. Eric Walter George, member of the Legislative Council of St. Helena, participated as an expert in the Pacific Regional Seminar organized by the Special Committee to review the political, economic and social conditions in the small island Non-Self-Governing Territories, held at Majuro, Marshall Islands, from 16 to 18 May 2000.

66. Mr. George maintained that the United Kingdom should reconsider its options on constitutional development in the island. Those options should include the present Constitution as well as the freely determined will of the people, taking into account article 21, paragraph 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV), to bring about appropriate alternatives to the present situation. In the White Paper on Partnership for Progress and Prosperity, it was stated that those arrangements needed to be revisited, reviewed and, where necessary, revised. According to Mr. George, St. Helena needed to move away from the present situation where the economic level was maintained solely as a result of United Kingdom aid, to one that generated its own wealth by improving access to the island. St. Helena needed the assistance of the Special Committee to achieve this.

67. In their conclusions, the participants in the Seminar welcomed the participation of an expert from St. Helena for the first time, and noted with concern the continuing socio-economic problems faced by the Territory, including high unemployment and limited transport and communications, and requested the Special Committee to bring the matter to the attention of the administering Power for remedial action (A/55/23 (Part I), annex, para. 39).

68. The Special Committee considered the question of St. Helena in July 2000 in the context of its consideration of the questions of American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman islands, Guam, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St. Helena, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the United States Virgin Islands. The Special Committee had before it the working paper on St. Helena (see A/AC.109/2000/8). At the 7th meeting, on 10 July, the Acting Chairman drew attention to draft resolution A/AC.109/2000/L.9. At the same meeting Ed Morgan made a statement on the question of St. Helena on behalf of the Citizenship Commission of St. Helena (see A/AC.109/2000/SR.7) At its 13th meeting, on 13 July, the Special Committee adopted revised resolution A/AC.109/2000/L.9/Rev. 1 and Corr.1 without a vote (see A/AC.109/2000/30).

B. Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

69. At its 11th meeting on 12 October 2000, the Fourth Committee adopted the draft consolidated resolution on the question of American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman islands, Guam, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St. Helena, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the United States Virgin Islands (A/C.4/55/L.5) by consensus (see A/C.4/55/SR.11, para. 40).

C. General Assembly

70. On 8 December 2000, the General Assembly adopted without a vote resolution 55/144 B, a consolidated resolution on the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Referring to St. Helena specifically in section IX of the resolution, the Assembly noted that the administering Power was prepared to discuss further with the people of St. Helena the statements made by members of the Legislative Council about the Constitution, and requested the administering Power to keep the Secretary-General informed of the wishes and aspirations of the people of the Territory regarding their future political status. The Assembly also requested the administering Power and relevant regional and international organizations to continue to support the efforts of the territorial Government to address the socio-economic development challenges of the Territory, including high unemployment and the problems of limited transport and communications.

Notes

[1] Information contained in the present working paper has been derived from information transmitted to the Secretary-General in June 2000 and April 2001 by the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations, and from published sources.

[2] "Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories", White Paper submitted to the House of Commons on 17 March 1999 and set out in A/AC.109/1999/1, annex.

[3] *St. Helena News*, 8 December 2000 and 5 January and 4 May 2001.

[4] St. Helena: the lost county of England, *A Report by the Bishop of St. Helena's Commission on Citizenship* (St. Helena, 1996), as quoted in the *St. Helena News*, 24 November 2000.

[5] Letter from Under Secretary of State, reported in the *St. Helena News*, 2 March 2001.

[6] Governor's Christmas Message, reported in the *St. Helena News*, 5 January 2001.

[7] *St. Helena News*, 13 October 2000 and 4 May 2001.

[8] Human Development Report, 1999, St. Helena.

[9] *St. Helena News*, 25 August and 15 December 2000.

[10] Information derived from "Tristan da Cunha" (1998), by Brian Baldwin, Administrator of Tristan da Cunha.

[11] Interview with the Administrator of Tristan da Cunha, Falkland Islands News Network (SARTMA), 6 December 2000, (see www.sartma.com).

[12] Statement by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister of State, House of Commons, 26 March 2001.

[13] Interview with European Union official, Christian Simmons, SARTMA, 16 January 2001.

[14] Administrator of Ascension Island, news release, 31 March 2001.

[15] *St. Helena News*, 6 April 2001.

[16] Foreign and Commonwealth Office, news release, 26 March 2001.

[17] *The Islander*, 8 March 2001.

[18] A/C.4/55/SR.4.